requirements of the textile industry, especially apparel, in the field of design, merchandising and marketing.

(xii) Facilities like eco-testing laboratories have been created to enable exporters to get garments/textiles pre-tested so that they conform to the requirements of the importing countries.

(d) To protect the interests of labour in the textile industry, a number of steps have been taken by the Government such as 'Mahatma Gandhi Bunkar Bima Yojana', 'Health Insurance Scheme for Handloom Weavers', 'Group Insurance Scheme', 'Group Workshed Scheme', 'Powerloom Service Centres' etc.

Removing specific duties on textile product under SAFTA

119. SHRI C. PERUMAL: Will the Minister of TEXTILES be pleased to state:

(a) whether textile industry has requested for removing specific duties, only in phases, on textile products under the South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA);

(b) if so, the reaction of Government thereto;

(c) whether it is proposed to abolish specific duties on products imported to India on demand from SAFTA member countries;

(d) if so, whether any study has been conducted on impact of such move on domestic companies;

(e) if so, the details thereof; and

(f) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF TEXTILES (SHRI SHANKERSINH VAGHELA): (a) to (f) Based on interactions with textile industry and a dipstick study by M/s. KSA Technopak, the Government has offered for removal of specific duties on import of certain textile products, in phases under South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) in the ongoing negotiations. Base on threat of import from SAFTA countries to India, the study has identified the textile items with specific duty (on 6-digit HS Classification) into four categories namely,

(i) Categories with Minimal Threat-99 items

(ii) Categories with Mild Threat-90 items

(iii) Categories with Medium Threat-39 items

(iv) Categories with Severe Threat-43 items

Cluster Development Scheme for Handloom Sector

120. SHRI S. ANBALAGAN: Will the Minister of TEXTILES be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that a new scheme called Cluster Development Scheme for the development of handloom sector, has been launched recently;

(b) if so, the salient features thereof;

(c) the steps being taken/proposed to be taken to provide assistance to Tamil Nadu under the scheme;

(d) whether this cluster approach would replace the cooperative approach for the development of handloom sector;

(e) if so, the reasons therefor; and

(f) if not, the steps being taken for strengthening cooperative sector in handlooms?

THE MINISTER OF TEXTILES (SHRI SHANKERSINGH VAGHELA): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. Ministry of Textiles has launched a new scheme titled as "Integrated Handloom Cluster Development Scheme" for the development of handloom sector, with an outlay of Rs. 40.00 crore for development of 20 handloom clusters throughout the country. Following a holistic approach, the scheme will cover the entire needs of the handloom sector in each cluster for supply of raw materials, marketing support, design inputs, upgradation of technology and welfare of the weavers. Quality human resource inputs for various functions will be provided to each cluster through an exclusive cluster based institution to which the Central Government will provide funds directly. Customised programmes will be developed for each cluster after a detailed survey and requirement analysis.